A father of the city

WHEN asked to nominate who was referred to as the “Father of Wagga Wagga” it is likely that most people would answer with a name such as Henry Baylis or George Forster.

Very few would offer up the name Frederick Anslow Tompson, after whom Tompson Street is named.

As historian Sherry Morris asserts, "Tompson was one of the first to settle in Wagga and for 50 years worked tirelessly and unswimmingly for its future. So great were his achievements and influence that he has, at times, been dubbed the ‘Father of Wagga Wagga’.”

Frederick Tompson, the son of convict Charles Tompson, first came to the area that was to become Wagga in 1822.

He and his younger brother Edwin were taking stock to "Rumnybarrenyha" station on the northern side of the Murrumbidgee River.

The following year Frederick married Eliza Esther Pearson in Windsor.

By 1840 the Tompkins were running 1200 cattle, 11,000 sheep, 30 horses and growing 20 acres of wheat at "Rumnybarrenyha", making it the biggest station in the area at the time.

Some 17 free men, 11 convicts, three ticket of leave holders and two Aboriginal boys were all working on the station at the time.

In 1847 Tompson was one of the 16 licensed pastoralists from the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Districts who petitioned for the establishment of a Court of Petty Sessions at Wagga.

Tompson was appointed as one of the first magistrates of the district in June 1847, where he often sat on the Wagga bench with William Macleay and John Peter Tompson’s decisions on the bench were not always popular however.

He was heavily criticised in The Sydney Morning Herald and the Goulburn Herald when he sentenced a shoe maker in Goulburn to seven days’ goal for saying that his dog had a better appearance than that of the chief constable.

The depression of the 1840s hit Tompson hard and he was forced to sell "Rumnybarrenyha".

In November 1848 he relinquished his role on the Wagga bench to accept the position of clerk of the petty sessions.

He was also appointed as the first postmaster in Wagga on January 1, 1849 (a role he held until 1850).

Due to lack of suitable accommodation in the fledgling village, Tompson decided to build his own dwelling on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River which he called "Waterview" (see above).

Tompson chose his own site for the house (near the present site of the Kilnacott building in Stuart Street) and asked the colonial secretary if it could remain there even if it contravened the new town plan.

His request was granted even though Tarcutta and Goulburn streets had to be realigned to suit his application.

In addition to his official roles, Tompson also conducted a store in Wagga known as “FA Tompson & Co” or the “Australian Warehouse”, located not far from his new home.

To help facilitate business in the township, Tompson also established the first banking facilities in 1855 for the Commercial Bank of Sydney.

Having decided to make Wagga his home, Tompson worked continually to ensure that the growing town had all the required amenities and services in place.

This included the building of the first school in 1861 on the site of the Riverine Club (corner Tarcutta and Stuart streets), the first Church of England Church constructed in 1850, the establishment of the first hospital, the formation of a mechanics’ institute in 1859, and the first substantial bridge over the Murrumbidgee River at Wagga called the “Company Bridge” for which Tompson was a founding director in 1882.

Due to the social leadership and influence that Tompson wielded in Wagga, he was not immune to failure.

By 1869 his store was experiencing severe financial hardship to the point where his mortgagee foreclosed on all his assets, including his beloved "Waterview" and the block of land he owned (essentially the river frontage block bounded by Stuart, Fitzmaurice and Kincaid Streets).

Tompson was even forced to face charges (which were dismissed) of "horse whipping" Hawkins, having been provoked by a defamatory editorial written by the latter.

Tompson’s luck took a turn again in 1870, when after the Wagga Borough was incorporated, he accepted the position of the first council clerk.

His service to the community also continued when he took on the role of coroner in October 1872, and he was also later appointed as secretary to the Murrumbidgee Pastoral Association in May 1874.

At the end of 1882 he retired from all his positions and made the decision to relocate to Sydney, where he later died of heart disease on May 8, 1884.